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100836Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004550

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STATE PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN CONTINUES EFFORTS TO PROMOTE
TAIWAN-JAPAN-US COOPERATION

REF: STATE 199897

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's government is continuing efforts to enhance Taiwan-Japan-US cooperation and views the rise in Tokyo-Beijing tensions as an opportunity to strengthen ties with Japan and the US in order to counter the PRC. AIT attended a recent Taiwan government sponsored conference designed to encourage discussions among Taiwan, Japan, and the US on closer security and economic cooperation in response to the PRC's growing influence in Asia. Taiwan participants argued that Taipei should play a more active role in the US-Japan security framework and asserted that Taiwan needs additional security guarantees from Tokyo and Washington to help reverse the domestic political division and uncertainty plaguing Taiwan over cross-Strait policies. End summary.

Conference Highlights Continuing Push for Better Ties

¶12. (C) A recent Taiwan government sponsored conference entitled "The Taiwan-US-Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue" was another example of the continuing push by the Chen administration to strengthen Taiwan's relationship with Japan and the US. The conference was organized by the pro-green Taiwan Thinktank and attended by high-level Taiwan government officials as well as former US and Japanese officials. The event was a top priority for the Chen administration and meetings were closed to the press. Presidential Office Secretary-General Yu Shyi-kun delivered the opening remarks

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and stressed that the Chen administration is committed to serving as a reliable partner with Japan and the US to ensure security and stability in the Taiwan Strait. He called for further integration of military, political, and economic cooperation among the three governments to help Taipei combat new challenges -- a clear reference to the PRC -- in the Asia-Pacific region.

¶13. (C) Taipei also hopes that recent tensions between Japan and the PRC will translate into closer ties with Tokyo. In his meeting with conference participants, President Chen called for closer security cooperation with Japan and urged Tokyo to consider signing an FTA with Taiwan, in part to reduce Taiwan's dependency on the PRC. Taiwan Thinktank's Lai I-chung, who organized the conference, privately told AIT that the Tokyo-Beijing chill has given Taiwan a "golden" opportunity and added that improving ties with Japan is a top priority for the Chen government. Lai added that Taipei hoped to cooperate more closely with Washington and Tokyo and argued that the US-Japan security alliance should be expanded to include Taiwan. He also stated that Taipei must be more proactive in providing for its own security by passing the Defense Procurement Special Budget.

Taiwan Wants Security Guarantees

¶14. (C) Vice-Foreign Minister Michael Kau remarked at the conference that Taiwan wants to be a "junior partner" in the US-Japan security framework for East Asia. Kau stated that close military cooperation with the US and Japan is very important for Taiwan in the context of Beijing's growing clout. He explained that Taiwan's public perception is that Washington is not as committed to defending Taiwan as it used to be. As a result, the PRC's successful "United Front" strategy of pressuring Taiwan diplomatically and economically, has encouraged some in Taiwan to support compromise with Beijing as the most practical policy. Kau noted Taiwan politicians and the people have become divided over Taiwan's cross-Strait policy and cited the KMT and PFP leader's trips to the PRC this past spring as an example. He argued if Japan and the US are more committed to Taiwan and can offer Taipei additional security guarantees, this will reduce the political gridlock plaguing Taiwan's Legislative Yuan.

¶15. (C) AIT Deputy Director separately briefed Taiwan NSC

Deputy Secretary-General Ke Cheng-heng on the US-Japan two-plus-two meetings and the "US-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future" issued at the meeting, drawing on reftel para 12. Ke said that Taiwan very much welcomes the steps described in the report because they enhance US capabilities to assist Taiwan if required. He added quickly and emphatically that Taiwan had decided not to comment on the meeting or the report because they had concluded such a comment would not be helpful. To the best of our knowledge, we have not seen comments in the media on this subject by any Taiwan government official.

Improving Trade Ties for "Economic Balance"

16. (C) Taiwan Thinktank's Lai suggested that Taiwan must also promote closer economic ties with the US and Japan for "economic balance" in the Asia-Pacific region. Lai said that Taiwan is being suffocated economically by Beijing and that Taipei needs to reassess itself via new trade mechanisms -- such as FTAs -- because Taiwan's role in APEC has been limited and marginalized by Beijing. He also argued that Taipei must do more to engage Southeast Asia and India in order to regain the economic balance that has been lost to the PRC. Noting that Tokyo and Washington are increasing their engagement with India and Southeast Asia, Lai asserted that Taipei must work more closely with the US and Japan in these efforts.

Comment: But Can Taiwan Remain Discreet?

17. (C) The Chen government has been pressing for years to strengthen its relationship at all levels with Japan and to increase cooperation among Taiwan, Japan, and the US. Taiwan's foreign policy efforts typically have more success when Taipei is willing to work quietly and stay below the radar of Beijing. While most of Taiwan's Japan policy officials understand that trying to develop overt ties with Tokyo would work against Taiwan, this nuanced understanding is not shared by all senior Chen administration officials. The challenge for the Chen administration is whether it can continue using subtle means outside of the media's glare to advance Taipei's ties with Japan.

18. (C) Taiwan also has continued to seek US assistance in arranging trilateral US-Japan-Taiwan events and cooperation. AIT is resistant to such an approach and while it may be in Taiwan's interests to cultivate closer ties with Tokyo, we will continue to explain to Taiwan officials that it is not appropriate for Washington to serve as a broker and that Taipei must develop its relationship with Japan on its own.
Paal